

WHY PIANOWELL HAD TO BE INVENTED

The Context Behind PianoWell

The key question is very simple.

Do you want to perform to attract attention and feed the ego, or do you want to play well to help heal others?

If you are reading this, the answer is likely the latter. You have simply been living by a different inner compass—one that measures success not by applause, but by authenticity.

Recognizing this can reduce longstanding confusion and guilt.

It clarifies a distinction between narcissists and empaths.

This explains why certain ideas never resonated deeply, even when you blamed yourself for not achieving them.

Across your music study, you may notice two groups among pianists, professors, and classmates. One appears successful—bright, praised, considered talented—and therefore confident. The other looks up to them, often feeling invisible, not good enough, insecure, confused, and lost.

This contrast reflects a culture that publicly praises narcissists while leaving empaths feeling secondary. Some quietly compete, tracking how often another pianist is called back, how many encores, whether there was a standing ovation. Others feel uneasy on stage and uncomfortable receiving compliments or applause.

In many prominent conservatories, high-status professors often present narcissistic traits. Entry usually requires an impressive resume: performances, competition wins, founding roles, recordings with known artists, masterclasses with famous teachers. Such titles primarily matter to narcissists. The required energy is significant and suits those aligned with that path.

As a result, candidate pools for elite positions often tend to favor narcissistic personalities.

The dynamic is reciprocal: institutions seek those resumes, and narcissists seek those roles. As public attention fades with age, praise can be maintained through students who naturally defer to authority.

Consequently, if many students finish 3-5 years of study with finances, hands, minds, and spirits depleted, that may be systemic. Teachers are not positioned for you; you are positioned for them. They draw on your confidence, inspiration, commitment, and energy. Without student attention, narcissistic personalities confront their own insecurity; with students, they can project it onto others, assigning blame outward. The feelings students carry are a direct reflection of this dynamic.

Thus, a celebrated world of pianists and professors is frequently organized around external validation —narcissism.

It often takes a personality organized around external validation to become “successful” in many careers, including concert performance and high-rank conservatory roles.

Empaths may not consciously name predatory dynamics while they are occurring, but they register them physically: tension, anxiety, fear; the sense of never being enough; experiences of belittling and disrespect. Boundaries are crossed. Effort is dismissed. Pain is invalidated.

When the playing is not successful, the responsibility is assigned to the student, not to the teacher. We accept that narrative, and in doing so, we enable narcissists to place their insecurity onto us. And when we finally draw a boundary and say “no,” it is rarely respected; and when it is, the response is often a cold, blaming hostility.

The PianoWell system is written by an empath, for empaths—people who work hard and receive little validation or visible result. It is demanding. It asks for mental clarity and sustained commitment. For many, that level of commitment is possible only because study feels like survival. If it does not, one may stop partway through the first book.

If you have felt guilty, off-path, and unrewarded despite hard work, consider this image: you push a cart that represents your practice, loading stones and unloading them, expecting a pile to appear. You look left across a channel for proof, and year after year nothing accumulates. Guilt and confusion grow.

The place you watched was a hub of narcissists and the people who feed them. Your deeper nature did not resonate there; only learned expectations said you should. Turn forward. Look directly ahead. Step back. You did not make a small pile—you built a castle.

You were not off your path. Your work was not for nothing. You are an empath—like the “ugly duckling” who was always a swan, simply in the wrong pond.

My own history centers on narcissistic abuse from my mother. Only in my forties did I see that my life path involved healing that relationship. Partners, teachers, doctors, jobs, colleges, classmates, “friends,” and students all mirrored that task. My mother showed narcissistic traits, likely bipolarity, cruelty, confusion, and depression.

Her father had physically abused her, so she never laid a hand on me; however, I later stayed in a physically abusive relationship for many years (leading at one point to focal dystonia), telling myself those wounds were minor compared to the psychological harm she had caused me.

To push me toward being “the most successful pianist,” she sometimes pretended to be dead or to attempt suicide, or harmed herself in front of me. This happened repeatedly from early childhood. My father was afraid and he did not intervene. Later he left. He was an empath, though not protective, and he escaped into alcohol. And even with all of that, he did love me very much.

There were no words or gestures of love. Instead, there were fabricated stories about people calling me stupid. Clothes went unwashed until a teacher intervened. The apartment was unclean. I was restricted from friends, from going out alone, from talking on the phone, and from TV. As a result, the first time I ever saw people hugging was on an American TV show when I was eighteen; it moved me to tears.

Outwardly, she wanted me to be the best; underneath, she preferred that I fail, consistent with narcissistic jealousy. Home felt like a war zone. A competitive school in Moscow was difficult, and I lacked friends. I was bullied, which I can understand given how I presented. Still, school felt considerably freer than home.

At nineteen, I began waking at night cursing her aloud, surprising myself because I had never said “no” or raised my voice. I had always lived with a sense of guilt and the feeling that I was too small to have needs of my own.

In my first conservatory year, I moved to a dorm. Leaving physically took one step; releasing her from my mind took another twenty years.

Because of this history, I quickly recognize narcissistic patterns in people and institutions and respond decisively.

I share this context because it is necessary to understand the circumstances that led to the invention of PianoWell and the environment around it.

The system arose from traumatic conditions. Had I been allowed normal distractions—friends, phone calls, TV—or even homework at school (often discouraged so I could practice), it would not exist. I practiced eight hours daily, recorded in a green notebook. Even on vacation we located a piano so I could practice after lunch.

The system formed because Playing Well equaled survival; I believed that mastering a piece would win my mother's approval.

In the 1990s I knew only the twenty-seven private teachers my mother hired; I had no exposure to alternate methods. If I had known about other methods—such as Alexander Technique or the Taubman approach—I would likely have borrowed concepts from them, rather than investing years into inventing something entirely new.

It was probably for the best that I never even thought about how I might one day share this knowledge with others. At that time, when the internet barely functioned and access to information was so limited, trying to imagine any possible way to communicate or reach people would likely have stopped me before I began.

Everything was created only for myself.

If I had been loved unconditionally, if I had free time with friends or other hobbies, or exposure to existing methods, I would not have built PianoWell. People in stable conditions rarely devote all their time, from age thirteen onward, to creating something no one requested. It was created in a kind of prison, by a child who believed they were unlovable and suffered daily, imagining that a workable system—and the ability to play well—would be the only escape.